

# Valley Women's Voice

SEPTEMBER

☞ A Chronicle of Feminist Thought and Action ☞

1991

## Fela's Agenda: Politics or Porno?

by Teresa Williams

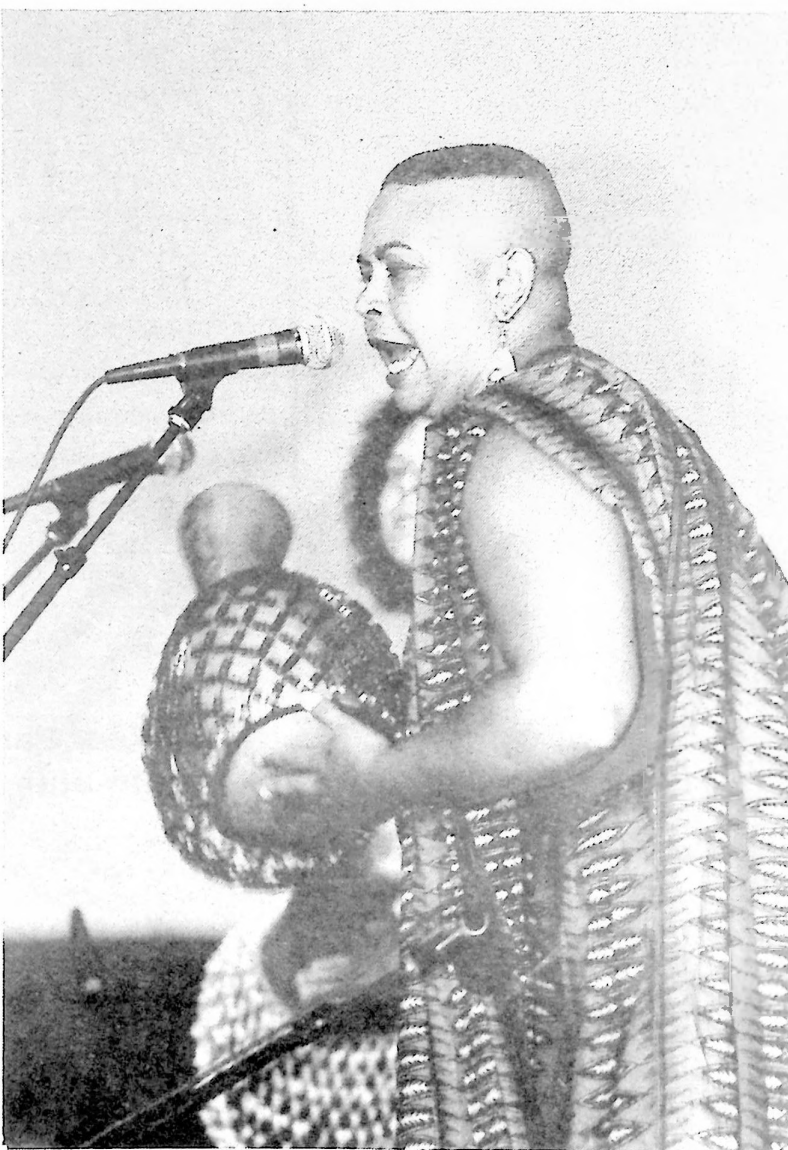
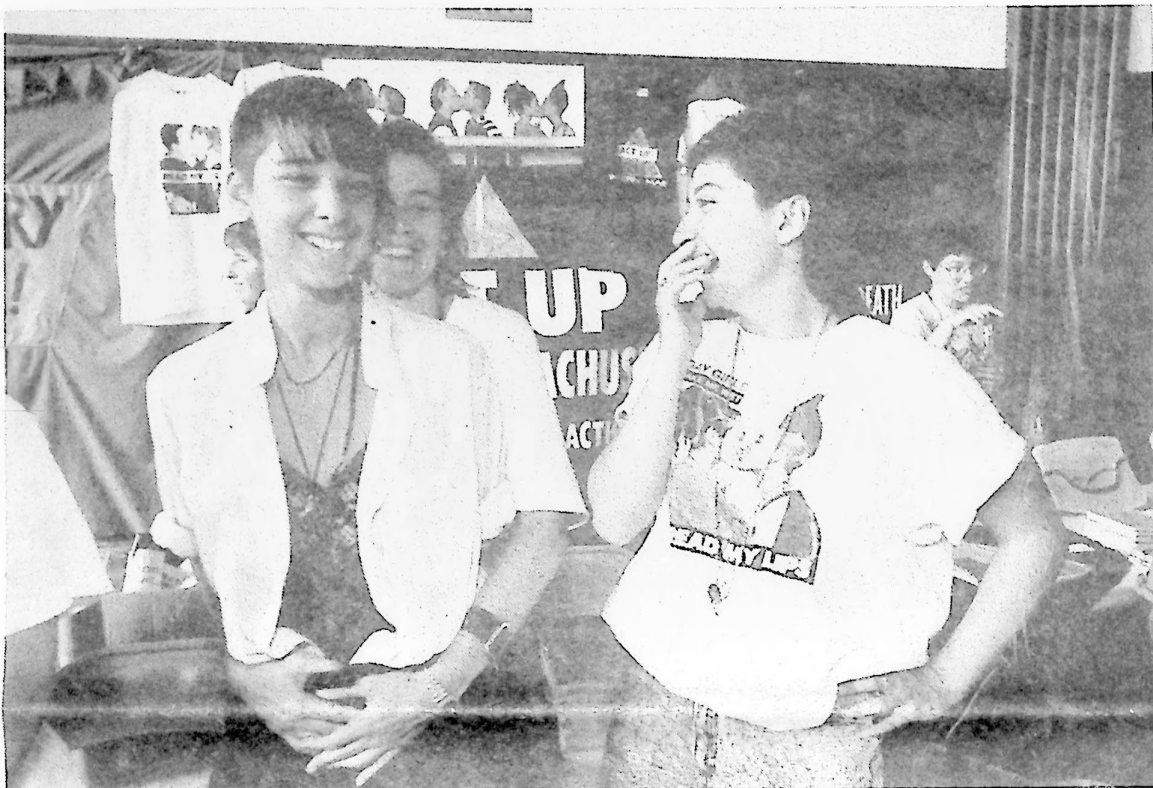
Women are many times hesitant to critically express their viewpoints of an issue or event—particularly if we are directly or indirectly involved in the process of the event itself. Sometimes we remain silent preferring to hold our tongues while continuing to feel disturbed within—knowing all along that such a silence is wrong. I must have pondered over the idea of writing this article several times in my mind before I finally grabbed a pencil to let my words hit the pages. As a result of making the decision to write about something which was disturbing and needed to be addressed, the choice to write was a liberating act in itself.

The July 25th *Bright Moments* festival featuring "Fela" deserves to be dealt with on a critical level due to the sexual exploitation of the female dancers which were intricately woven within Fela's performanceset. I personally thought we were going to be able to listen to Fela's politically inspiring tunes and stories for which he is so acclaimed. I was not prepared to witness on stage his female dancers gyrating their bodies to the Afro-beat and rhythms of pseudo-politicized lyrics. Since when do sexual exploitation and politics play hand-in-hand? It was indeed political-porno in the guise of West African culture. Fela knew he only had limited time to play and he made this quite clear from the start. I believe if a person has something of importance to say to the world through their mode of self-expression, that person needs to set the priorities straight. Fela chose to deal with material which dealt with sexuality, stating that sex is not corrupt but that political corruption and oppression are. I was baffled that he would even make such a contrast between the two. Nevertheless, he chose to deal with the issue of sex as his opening number (which was the core of his entire set).

The viewpoints and responses I have heard from many of the women in attendance regardless of cultural backgrounds and/or sexual preferences, have echoed my own reactions. I recently spoke with a close friend in San Francisco who attended Fela's concert there three months ago and she as well as numerous women that attended that concert were also appalled at the exploitative nature of Fela's performance. This was certainly validating as I realize now that this was not only an isolated incident in the Valley but is apparently a well-packaged tour with solid intentions to exploit the women rather than to address issues which should have more urgency on a political level. As a result of witnessing such degrading and explicitly offensive material onstage that evening, many were forced to examine and question Fela's conscience, ethics and agenda as well as the plight of West African women in general (particularly in the eyes of Fela).

continued on page 9

## The Northampton/Amherst Lesbian Festival



On August 3, 1991, 1500 women from all around New England—and more distant places—came to UMASS for the second annual Northampton/Amherst Lesbian Festival. Although the Festival was moved from being by the Pond and into the Student Union Ballroom because of rain, many Lesbians came around to join the crowd, enjoy the performers and browse through the booths of Lesbian artists. Above, three festivalgoers fool around at the ACT UP/Western Mass. information table. At left, performer Nurudafina Pili Abena onstage at the Festival. Photos by Julia Schmaltz.

(The Northampton/Amherst Lesbian Festival is put on by WOW Productions)

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## Credits

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## Policy Statement

The *Valley Women's Voice*, a monthly feminist newsjournal, welcomes women's writings, poetry, graphics, and photography that reflect a feminist commitment to the empowerment of all women. We aim to communicate and strengthen bonds between women by making them visible in our pages.

The *Valley Women's Voice* is produced on a collective, consensus, volunteer basis by a group of feminists. We often do not agree with all opinions expressed in the *Voice* by individual authors, but we accept responsibility for choosing to print everything in the paper.

We view the *Voice* as an ongoing opportunity for all of us—readers and collective members—to learn more about ourselves, each other, and the many truths of feminism.

### CONTRIBUTION GUIDELINES

The *Valley Women's Voice* welcomes letters, essays, narratives, interviews, newsbriefs, poems, short stories, cartoons, graphics, and photographs. Written submissions should be 3 to 5 pages typed, double spaced. Your name,

address, and phone number must be enclosed with all materials so that we may verify submissions and/or contact you to discuss any necessary editorial changes. A short biographical statement is also appreciated. An author who does not wish her name to be printed should indicate this when submitting items. Please enclose a SASE if you would like materials returned to you. The decision to print materials is made collectively, and all major editorial changes are made in conjunction with the author. However, we reserve the right to make minor editorial corrections to submissions for purposes of clarity and space constraints. Although we cannot afford to pay contributors, we do send a complimentary copy of the issue in which your item appears.

Send submissions to: *Valley Women's Voice*, 321 Student Union Building, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA 01003. If you have ideas for future articles, or are not sure how your particular interests and talents may add to the paper, call us at (413) 545-2436.

### CALENDAR & ANNOUNCEMENT LISTINGS

The *Valley Women's Voice* prints announcements and publicizes events of interest to

women. Listings are free and should be kept to 5 lines in length. (Items will be edited to fit space constraints.) Announcements for non-profit organizations will be given preference and additional space when it is available.

Calendar listings should provide the following information: name, date, time, and location of the event; cost of attending the event (sliding scale? work exchange?); the sponsor of the event and recipient of proceeds, if any; a statement about accessibility for disabled women (wheelchair accessible? ASL interpreted?); and a phone number for inquiries.

Individuals and organizations may request that a photograph be printed along with a Calendar listing. A nominal fee is charged to cover printing costs. Only black-and-white photographs can be accepted.



## Come Visit Us...

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## Letter to the Community

Before we begin, we'd like to wish everyone a positive and energetic September—we're moving into the lunar month of Muin. A big warm Welcome Back to all Five College students and wishes for a successful semester to you all. The VWV will be having an informal, come-as-you-are Open House in the second week of this month, so come on over and partake of the festivities, look at the herstory of the Voice and admire our new lava lamp. There will be a more formal info meeting in the third week of September for women who want to join our collective - keep your peepers peeled for posters announcing the place and time. The deadline for submissions for the October issue is September 17 and we would love to have (1) photographs of

stuff that's doing around town and (2) graphics-artists, please send your sketches and drawings to us. Also, if you come across local or global news concerning women, please pass it along to us so the Valley can hear about it. In terms of womanpower, we need help in production which means women who are familiar with desktop publishing or are willing to learn. We also need help with distribution to get the Voice delivered to local and outlying points. And the most important thing on our wish list right now is a laser printer. Without this piece of equipment, production is very costly. Hope to see some of you this semester!

## Send in Your News...

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# NEWSBRIEFS NEWSBRIEFS NEWSBRIEFS NEWSBRIEFS



## NATIONAL

**NEW BEDFORD MURDERS REMAIN UNSOLVED**—The murder charge against the prime suspect in one of the New Bedford serial murders has been dropped. Nine women were killed and two more are believed to have been killed in the southeast area of the state in 1988. All of the women used illegal drugs or drank heavily and several were prostitutes. Lawyer Kenneth C. Ponte, the former prime suspect in the murder of Rochelle Dopierala, admittedly knew several of the victims. Madeline Perry, the mother of Debra DeMello, one of the women found dead, says she still believes Ponte was involved in her daughter's death. "Because of the girls being junkies, there hasn't been any public outcry" said Judy DeSantos, sister of the second woman found. "If it had been somebody's mother getting off the bus, then they'd be marching in the streets." (*Boston Globe*, 7/26 and *Daily Hamp. Gazette*, 8/5)

**WOMAN TO HEAD THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BLACK JOURNALISTS (N.A.B.J.)**—At its annual convention in late July the N.A.B.J. elected television producer Sidmel Estes-Sumpter as its president. Although the 2,100 member organization is 2/3 female, Estes-Sumpter is the first woman ever elected to preside over the N.A.B.J. In another first, four of the other top five positions will be filled by women.

**ABORTION CONTRACTS DEEMED INVALID BY TENNESSEE COURT**—In a breach of contract suit Jefferson circuit judge Edmund Karem ruled against a Louisville surgeon who had brought the suit against his secretary who he claimed did not have the abortion he paid her \$20,500 to have. According to the *National Law Journal*, this could be the nation's first such ruling.

**RESTRICTIVE ABORTION LAW CAUSES CONVENTION CANCELLATION**—Louisiana's recent enactment of a strictly defined abortion law (only in clear cases of rape and endangerment to mother's life) has caused the American Psychological Association's board of directors to cancel plans to hold its 1997 annual convention in New Orleans. This decision was based upon "a 22-year-old APA resolution declaring that 'termination of unwanted pregnancy be considered a civil right of the pregnant woman'." The APA's cancellation may mean a loss in the millions for Louisiana. Other organizations, such as the American Institute for Ultrasound in Medicine may soon follow suit. (*Science*, 7/26)

**SUPREME COURT DISRUPTED BY ABORTION RIGHTS ACTIVISTS**—For only the second time in the history of the U.S. Supreme Court, its chambers have been disrupted by political protest—both disturbances due to abortion activists. In late May abortion rights activists from NOW, New Jewish Agenda, and Refuse and Resist protested the Court's *Russ vs. Sullivan* decision. The previous disruption of the Court was in 1989 after the Webster decision. (*In These Times*, week of 6/12)

**SURVEY FINDS EMPATHY FOR WOMEN WHO KILL ABUSERS**—In a survey conducted by *Glamour* magazine, 81 percent of the 1,668 women who responded said that a woman who kills an abusive partner should be found not guilty. Being repeatedly beaten by a partner could

lead to such a state of hopelessness that murder would be the only option, according to 88 percent of the respondents. Sixty-seven percent said they could see themselves killing a partner who repeatedly physically and emotionally abused them.

Nearly one million women die each year due to complications from childbirth, abortion, birth control and reproductive tract infections, according to Jodi Jacobson author of "Women's Reproductive Health: The Silent Emergency" released by the

believes that when she tried to get her job back by exposing the discrimination, the Schultz murder investigation then focused on her as the prime suspect. Bembenek is asking Canada to grant her political asylum under the terms of the Geneva Con-



Pondering T-shirts and political messages at the Northampton/Amherst Lesbian Festival

Eighty-three percent of the women responding said that abused women should not be imprisoned in for killing their partners in self-defense, and 56 percent said that they didn't think that granting clemency would make other women kill their partners without seeking other options.

**AFRICAN-AMERICAN LIFE EXPECTANCY ON THE DECREASE**—Life expectancy for African-Americans has dropped for the third year in a row, according to a recent report from federal health officials. Heart disease, homicides, and AIDS are cited as the most fatal factors. Figures from 1988, the latest year for available data, list African-American life expectancy at 69.2 years, a slight drop from the all-time high in 1985 of 69.5. Meanwhile, the life expectancy for white people is still rising with a record 75.6 years in 1987 and the same for 1988. (*Boston Globe*, 7/26)

## INTERNATIONAL

**FEMALE OPPOSITION LEADER JAILED IN PANAMA CITY, PANAMA**—In late July Isabel Corro, president of The American Invasion Victims' Parents, was given a jail sentence of ten days for painting "Yankee Go Home" on palm trees outside the American Embassy. This is a particularly harsh and tellingly political sentence since not only is such graffiti common-place in Panama City but also because while 80% of 3,500 individuals jailed previous to her arrest still awaited sentencing she had already received hers. A reporter covering the story concluded that Ms. Corro's arrest "was a political decision intended to silence the opposition." (7/28, *Le Monde* section of *The Weekly Guardian*)

**GLOBAL CRISIS OF WOMEN'S REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH**

World Watch Institute. Hundreds of millions more women suffer injury related to similar reproductive complications. Jacobson attributes these figures to poverty which can stand in the way of receiving adequate reproductive counseling and treatment, as well as cultural factors varying from needing the husband's permission to receive medical treatment to restrictive diets during pregnancy. For an African woman these differences mean that she runs a one in twenty-one chance of dying from a pregnancy related cause within her lifetime. By contrast the risk is one in 6,366 for a woman in North America. (*Science*, 6/21)

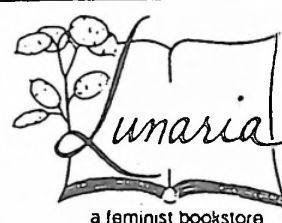
**50% INCREASE IN POVERTY AMONG RURAL WOMEN**—A recent report by the U.N. Fund for Agricultural Development estimates that of 930 million rural poor, 550 million are women. Of that number, 363 million are in Asian, 13 million are in Africa, 43 million in Latin America and the Caribbean, and 18 million in the Near East and North Africa. These women who tend to be both agricultural laborers and producers are ignored by traditional aid programs which tend not to recognize the role of women in the developing countries. Currently the percentage of poor rural women with access to credit amounts only to 5% to 10%.

**CONVICT SEEKS ASYLUM ON BASIS OF SEX DISCRIMINATION**—Lawrence Bembenek, convicted in 1982 of murder and sentenced to life in prison, has petitioned for political refugee status in Canada, where she was arrested last October after escaping from a Wisconsin prison. Bembenek says she did not kill Christine Schultz, a former wife of the man Bembenek married in 1981. Gender discrimination, along with her outspoken advocacy of women's rights, ended her short career as a police cadet, says Bembenek, and she

vention on the basis of sex discrimination. The only other American to win political refugee status from Canada in modern times was Robert Satiacum, a Puyallup Indian leader from Washington state. A final decision on Bembenek's petition is not expected until October. (*San Diego Union*, 8/14)

**CANADA SUPREME COURT STRIKES DOWN RAPE SHIELD LAW**—On August 22, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled 7-2 that rape victims may be questioned in court about their personal sexual past at the trial judge's discretion. The 1983 rape shield law was struck down on the grounds that protecting victims from being questioned about their sexual histories obstructs the rights of the accused from mounting a full defense. Women's groups in Canada and the United States immediately criticized the decision, pointing out that it opened the door to increased prosecutorial harassment. Critics also predicted a decrease in the number of women and children reporting rapes. (*New York Times*, *Boston Globe* 8/23)

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# Chemical Addiction: A Lesbian Secret, A Gay Albatross

by the addiction recovery specialist team at Lifeline Counseling Center

Do you know that 25-30% of your lesbian sisters are dependent on, abuse, and/or have severe problems with alcohol and other drugs? In the general population this number is only 10%. How can this figure be so high? And how is it that we do not more efficiently address the monumental problem associated with these addictions?

We know that genetic predisposition plays a major role in the development of chemical dependence, but research does not indicate that gay men and lesbians are any more or less genetically vulnerable than the general population.

Many would agree that, until recently, lesbian and gay bars were one of the few social outlets available to members of the gay and lesbian communities. It was precisely in these settings that gay men and lesbians were able to find refuge from a government which called them illegal, a church which branded them immoral, and a society which stigmatized them as evil deviants.

The bars then originally offered a place to meet and find solace. Today however, research indicates that only 10% of the lesbian and gay population frequents these establishments. So let us look deeper into this problem and consider the following scenarios:

- a 33 year old married woman, mother of three, with emerging lesbian desires, sips wine most of the day in order to tolerate the confusion and discordant lifestyle she feels locked into;
- an 18 year old female, who recognizes but cannot accept her lesbian orientation, smokes marijuana all day in an effort to

block out the truth and to hide her secret from her friends and family;

- a 54 year old lesbian living with her lover for twenty years, with no friends, finds her lover attracted to another woman and discovers cocaine gives her the energy she needs to get out of bed each day.

These vignettes are typical of an endless variety of addiction scenarios that get played out every day. These sad testimonies are indications of the underlying psychological causes of chemical addiction in the lesbian communities - namely, external and internal oppression and hatred.

The reality of external oppression and of the many forms it takes is familiar to us all. We all have our own stories told, untold or in any case needing to be told again and again. Examples of this kind of discrimination exist in churches and synagogues, in the workplace, in housing and in access to medical care, just to name a few. Anti-gay violence has been on the increase for some time now. Resorting to alcohol and other drugs has long been a community-sanctioned response to these forms of oppression.

Internal oppression, or as it has been called, internalized homophobia is a much more insidious route to addiction. Inasmuch as most lesbians are products of a heterosexual environment, we learn gender-appropriate behaviors at a relatively early age and also the penalties for not conforming to these standards. As a consequence, any emerging desires for someone of our same sex may be met with confusion, self-hatred and shame, the very soil in which addictive patterns grow. If

alcohol and other drugs are used to cope with these painful feelings, psychological dependence will more than likely become established. This addiction will then, for a time, allow for some relief from the painful feelings. The "numbing" which results from "using" allows the individual to deny the conflicts associated with their sexual orientation. To complicate matters, this denial is often sanctioned and necessary to continue and deepen one's drug and alcohol dependence. In other words, denial of a problem with chemical dependence is a major factor in rationalizing one's continued use of alcohol and other drugs. The same defense of denial of the physical disease of addiction and of the social disease of homophobia often fuel each other, leaving the addict in a confusing and entrenched position from which there seems no way out.

Unfortunately, lesbian and gay communities are, in general, no more tolerant of unchecked chemical addiction than the heterosexual community is. So lesbian and gay addicts find themselves not only alienated from the mainstream community because of their sexual orientation, but also from their lesbian and gay subculture. And so a downward spiral continues. Alcohol and other drugs, originally intended as acceptable coping mechanisms, approved by society and readily available, become destroyers of careers, relationships and lives.







The scope and severity of chemical addiction in the lesbian communities are too complex to be treated in an article of this length but, as devastating as the pic-

ture of chemical dependency is, there is now some hope. Appropriately enough, most of the sources of optimism can be found in our community. Social alternatives other than bars have become more plentiful, acceptable and accessible. There is an increasing awareness of the immunosuppressant nature of alcohol and other drugs and people are discovering healthier alternatives. Many individuals have taken the enormous risk of starting a journey of self-acceptance. They are relinquishing their roles of victims and are asserting and treasuring their sexuality as the gift it is.

And the professional chemical addiction community, once as homophobic as any other group, is getting its act together and acknowledging that internalized homophobia must be addressed if addictions are to be treated. The first inpatient chemical addiction treatment center exclusively for gay men and lesbians is in its sixth year. Mainstream treatment centers now offer gay and lesbian treatment tracks. There are lesbian and gay halfway houses and gay AA is even available in some small towns and cities. Locally, there is Lifeline Counseling Center (as of January renamed LifeCourse Counseling Center), the Pioneer Valley's gay, lesbian and bisexual counseling center. Lifeline offers its own Chemical Addiction Treatment Program which works with each individual developing a treatment plan tailored to suit the unique needs of each person. Treatment plans may include individual counseling, an ongoing recovery group, and/or psycho-social education. People in all stages of recovery are welcome to take advantage of one or more of the services available in the program.

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# Film Analysis: The Long Walk Home

by Cate Rowen (This article reveals details of the film's plot)

*The Long Walk Home*, directed by Richard Pierce, played in theaters this spring and is already available on videocassette at Pleasant Street Video in Northampton and at Video to Go in Amherst. This film, well-made and well-acted, has not received the critical attention it deserves for two obvious reasons: it is about civil rights and it is about women. Of course, who has the time to review *The Long Walk Home* with such masterpieces as *Switch* and *The Silence of the Lambs* hitting the theaters at the same time? Perfectly understandable. So it must also be perfectly understandable that it did not get the publicity or distribution it deserved. For these reasons you should rent this film and watch it at home if you missed it on the big screen. This is an important film for feminists to see, particularly for white feminists trying to understand the relationship between racism and sexism.

*The Long Walk Home* portrays the intersection of sexism and racism in an unusually honest and clear way. Sexism and racism operate in concert, but the film portrays the white female character as both a victim of sexism and an agent of racism. There is a recognition of the complex relationship between racism and sexism, an acknowledgment of the power generated when women fight both, and the divisions created when women do not recognize the intersection of these oppressions. Even so, the film achieves this powerful alliance by relying on the stereotype of the black mammy. For the white viewer, the use of this stereotype eases the work of indentifying with the film's message.

The film centers on two families, one white and one black, at the time of the Montgomery bus boycott. Odessa Cotter (Whoopi Goldberg) is Miriam Thompson's (Sissy Spacek) family's maid. At the advent of the boycott, Odessa must walk to work. Miriam offers to drive her. But when her husband Norman finds out, an example of the relationship between sexism and racism in the film occurs. Norman jumps out of bed, ordering Miriam not to drive Odessa to work. The scene borders on physical violence, and cuts to a scene of Miriam fixing her tear-stained face in the bathroom. A little later, Norman sits her on the bed and lectures her on the reasons for his orders. He stands over Miriam, telling her how "Odessa can never be like us...we'll never really know her." Miriam sits silently, but as he speaks a look of defiance sparks in her eyes.

Even though Miriam is not completely dissuaded from her convictions, when Odessa arrives at work—after walking for hours—Miriam explains to Odessa why she is unable to drive her to work. Instead of confessing that she is unable to deal with her husband's anger, she repeats his argument, almost as if she is testing its

validity. "It's just that Norman doesn't see why I should have to suffer because you won't ride the bus." Odessa responds: "I ain't tasked you to suffer, Mrs. Thompson." In this scene, Miriam talks, standing above Odessa, mirroring the scene between Norman and Miriam. Only this time Miriam merely mouths the words of her husband.

These two scenes portray the structural relationships of the three characters, between themselves and society. Miriam, an owning-class, white woman, is both the receiver and the agent of oppression. Norman, a white, owning-class man, uses his power to coerce Miriam into enforcing his racism for him. It is interesting that Miriam chooses to repeat her husband's injunctions to Odessa, as if she recovers some level of power that she had lost through her humiliation at her husband's hands. When she passes this on to Odessa, she feels powerful as a part of white society rather than weakened as part of a disempowered female community. In these two scenes, Miriam experiences a crisis of identification. Society expects her to support white supremacy by following her husband's orders, thereby submitting to male supremacy. If she fights the sexist and racist terms of her husband's position, she gives up her class and race privilege. In comparison to Odessa, Miriam has a level of mobility that Odessa cannot have, but she also has an obvious level of culpability which goes hand in hand with this mobility.

The story is narrated by Miriam's youngest daughter, Mary Catherine, at the beginning and end of the film, although it does not follow her perspective throughout. This calls into question the validity of using a white, owning class point of view to tell a story about the Black civil rights movement. Most of Odessa's valorization in the film comes from her position as mammy and loving caretaker of Miriam's children, and of Miriam as well. Odessa is always a caring teacher, in spite of the vicious racism and class oppression that she encounters from Miriam. This is a tribute to the character's patience, but it also forces her to put up with racist attitudes, allowing well-intentioned whites to be slow and perhaps lazy in their growth.

In the pivotal scene described earlier, Miriam tells Odessa of her admiration for her based on her skills and her care for Miriam's children. Miriam points out how Odessa cared for Mary Catherine when she had the chicken pox. Odessa responds that anyone would do that for a child, but Miriam wonders out loud if she would have done it for Odessa's children. That night, Miriam confronts Norman, telling him that if he does not like the way she runs the house she will go out and get a job, and

they can share the housework. In these two scenes, the women are valorized for two very different reasons. Miriam's independence and economic power (she has a college education) make it possible for her to challenge her husband's wishes, whereas Odessa is valorized for her self-sacrificing mothering skills.

At rare moments Odessa does break out of this mammy role, but they are often comic. While serving Christmas dinner, Odessa walks in on Norman's mother criticizing the bus boycott with the typical racist line that Blacks are lazy. Meanwhile, Odessa has been working since six a.m. on Christmas day. Odessa offers rolls around the table. As she walks out after a long Christmas at work, she comments to her co-worker, "Mrs. Thompson almost got a plate of rolls busted upside her head". Ha Ha. This comedy finally relieves the audience from the oppressive sensation of watching this woman restrain her pride and anger in the face of racism. But this release is not realistic or useful in motivating an audience. With Odessa's flippancy, white viewers are essentially let off the hook for our participation in this system of humiliation.

When Miriam finally has a change of heart, Odessa's role remains that of a caretaker. As she and Miriam sit in the car deciding whether or not Miriam should drive for the carpool in support of the boycott. Odessa warns her of the likely repercussions of this action and reminds Miriam that she is committing to a larger civil rights issue, rather than just the right to sit in the front of the bus. Then Odessa tells her, "No one is going to think any less of you if you don't." To me this statement seems surprising from a woman of Odessa's political commitment. It is also interesting that this line appears in the trailer promoting the film.

Odessa again fills her role as mammy here, ensuring that Miriam does not get in over her head. At the same time she breaks out of this role by warning Miriam that the step into the civil rights participation will strip her of her privileged position in white society. She hints that Miriam's commitment up to this time has been under her protection and mediation and tells her that in the future the movement will extend to Black control of their own communities, desegregation and voting power. This moment is a rite of passage for Miriam: she must decide her level of commitment to a cause she has only begun to support. She has so far used the excuse that she is only being a good housekeeper in preventing her maid from quitting by driving her to work.

But the true test of Miriam's allegiance does not come until later; even as a driver for the carpool (facilitated by Odessa

being at home taking care of Miriam's children) she is not actually challenged by white supremacy. The Black community's original distrust and later acceptance of Miriam is portrayed in a mildly comical and feel-good fashion.

In the final scene, Odessa stands up to a violent mob of racist men (including Miriam's husband and brother-in-law) who are threatening the women in the carpool. After a tearful moment of indecision, Miriam joins hands with the women—only when one offers her hand. Suddenly the film is over. The audience is left questioning the future relationship between the two women. *The Long Walk Home* critiques the business of domestic service, while leaving it unresolved for its characters. So in the end, the issue slides.

Even so, the critique exists in the film, and is refreshing. The film presents the stratification of women clearly, rather than ignoring or obscuring it, while showing the viewer the reasons it is necessary to recognize and fight this stratification. At this point in the women's movement, this is crucial. Exclusion of women of color has been talked about, challenged and is being addressed. But I have found a desire within myself and other white feminists to ignore our role of oppressors, not just in society at large, but even within feminism. "Inclusion" does not necessarily address the issue because in our white vacuum, we may include representations of women of color that do more to salve our consciences than to change the world.

I am interested in a reaction I heard leaving the theater: it was good, but it is too bad that it was told from the white point of view. That is a problem only because films that are told from a Black perspective are so underrepresented in the film mainstream. This is starting to change due to filmmakers like Spike Lee and the vanguard of Black filmmakers who are suddenly being noticed in his wake. However, this group only represents Black male perspectives so far. Like *Cry Freedom*, a film about a white reporter who is harassed by the South African government because he is befriended by Steven Biko, *The Long Walk Home* is the story of a white person's growing awareness of the struggle against racism, and not a film about the struggle against racism itself. This is a problem, because of the historical void in popular culture when it comes to the civil rights movement. Even so, it is possible that this film can succeed in its didactic project.

If the film is directed at white audiences (with an acknowledgement of all the problems this brings up), perhaps it can play the role of teacher for those of us who need to be taught to facilitate our understanding of racism, thereby creating an atmosphere in which whites are exposed to the conflicts they will face in a struggle against racism, and showing us why this struggle is necessary.

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# Poetry

## WITHIN THE WEEPING WALL

Mirrored memories. Stone  
walls. Bygone days.

Cold. White.  
Blocks of stone  
drink up my sorrow  
entomb my tears.  
Gray dawn  
howls.  
Stories  
lost at sea  
(centuries ago)  
wash ashore  
to hear  
the wall weep.

—Debra S. Lynn  
Bridgeton, Missouri



## SALLY/SALOME

She dances till the porch boards  
move like piano keys to her feet,  
  
rocking the harmonica player in his old chair,  
setting the ivy trailing in a tremble,  
  
shaking the wings of crows, their shadows  
flicking over the ground in blue shapes,  
  
changing the place and time to a courtyard  
shivering in firelight, a shining platter  
  
quivering with the new-cut head  
of her dear John.

—Elizabeth R. Curry  
Slippery Rock, Pennsylvania

## INCIDENT AT THE DENTIST'S

spit says the dentist  
& a cat comes to mind  
so I hiss & he says bite  
so I slash his sausage finger  
& wonder if my spite  
will get me a case  
of AIDS  
  
& justly so for my gall  
appalls even the heavens  
how can you be such a naughty girl  
asks my mother perfunctorily  
grinning at my verve  
unsecretly hating the professional  
who sucks away her salary  
for this ugly kid in the chair  
this braided terror  
this symbol of all that makes life least while  
this beast in pink pants  
this young medusa madonna  
this awful example  
this independent female.

—Elizabeth R. Curry  
Slippery Rock, Pennsylvania

## END OF THE WORLD HOTEL

The skeleton crab fell...  
broke his leg...windswept  
memories.

You left today.  
I ate a box  
of graham crackers  
busied myself  
doing laundry  
paying bills  
packing up  
memories.

You took away  
the moon.  
The stars left too.  
“End of the World Hotel”  
vacant now  
living on guests  
who come  
to visit  
every now and again.

—Debra S. Lynn  
Bridgeton, Missouri

## Cross Words

Stung  
and flew away.  
I chased after  
playing your games  
of twisted verbal tennis.  
You practiced your backhand.

I tried to solve your puzzles,  
you cheated.  
My psychic told me,  
as she read my cards,  
you had marked them.  
The deck has been stacked  
in your favor  
for centuries.

I like pieces that fit together  
I like cross word puzzles  
all filled in.  
But there were clues you wouldn't share  
pieces you hid  
and you called me a child  
when I overturned the game.  
So I quit.

—Elaine Posanka  
East Setauket, New York



## Mothergarden

Spring came.  
The awakening spring that  
screamed for all  
the flowers  
my mother never grew.

Answering the call  
I pushed my way back,  
back through jumbled wildflowers  
and tangles of every exotic plant  
I'd ever admired,  
back to the edges of  
mother's carefully weeded garden.

Found mother,  
kneeling beside wilted blooms  
of put-aside-dreams,  
she desperately tried to revive them,  
her trowel turned up dust,  
and dust.

“Mother, Stop!  
dreams do not grow  
in neat little lines.  
You are cutting back  
passions and emotion.  
Who told you they were weeds?  
It's a lie.  
They are fertilizer.”

“Mother, leave this  
stifling little patch.  
Come run with me  
in lush fertile jungles.”  
But mother only looked at me  
as if I were crazy.  
She was rooted to the spot.

—Elaine Posanka  
East Setauket, New York

## LAST REMAINS

Her final request—  
Bring her home.  
Our home.

On my half-birthday  
I salted the sea  
with her bones.

—Debra S. Lynn  
Bridgeton, Missouri





# Memories Commencement 1970

Meganutrients packed into  
a microscopic pellet for  
breakfast on the quick to  
the kates marys and jans  
of steno pools and  
answering services serving  
fuel for aesthetic appetites  
of lunchtime gallery goers  
to the chimpanzee squiggles  
& screeches of the ooze &  
ah-hs of this week's exhibit

Living in unlicensed "sin"  
summer's a gay whirl of  
synthetics & blends for some  
while nature's miracles still  
adorn the backs of others Our  
irritants desecrated an ozone  
layer as we continue to break  
distance barriers Our collective  
brain reels from the swift ride!  
And lament our irritants

Age of morning-after injection  
anytime shock therapy Armies  
of aluminum cans march profusely  
along checkout counters to the  
drone of punchkeys and cyclamate  
giggles Other armies make people  
dead While reading to the Back  
of the bus a child ventures from  
his cradle

thrusting feet upon the moon

—Charlene Mary-Cath Smith  
Manchester, New Hampshire



## Our Ending

Your secrets,  
your silence  
cut like sharp edged glass.  
O' Woman, I grieved  
for the rainbow that once shone  
over our Capeside morning last August,  
for the glow of fireworks that lit the sky  
the first time we touched  
our Fourth of July.

Neither one of us wanted the unrelenting storm  
you led us through.  
All that was left were branches broken,  
trees fallen, and the secret  
of where our rainbow faded  
hidden in the dark, dead calm  
that pierced through the nights  
of our ending.

—K.M.  
Northampton, Massachusetts



(The future is a form of dark) —for Polly

The future is a form of dark, alarming  
as clear cold August days that mock  
your clothes (a feeling shared) I know  
as I have seen you read even the worst book  
through as though by persevering a single  
word might open wide and save

The future is a form of dark, somnific  
a psychic dislocation that makes us breathe  
through bandages of wounds we've yet to cut  
and leaves words wired to our teeth  
a bluish space of unsaid things we may  
always drop behind our eyes but we go on  
this is no cinematic blaze of silence to signify  
what is final and complete

The future is a form of dark, spectacular  
so many miniature nights that bloom  
around us like flowers everywhere  
a form diminished slightly in my dream  
it is a massive gothic kitchen where once we met as children  
fooled by promises of glistening cake, older now  
we reappear as all this rushing towards  
the Ending ends—astounded, gentle  
mouth on mouth, we smile  
then we eat

—Jennifer Willoughby  
St. Paul, Minnesota

## Stamps Falling

© by May Wolf

He always said, "Don't grab at the stamp if  
it slips out of the tongs." When I dropped  
a stamp, I was tempted to clutch at it like a  
mosquito. "Just let it fall," dad said.

He took one of his upside down air-  
plane stamps to use as an example. The  
postal service, many years before, had ac-  
cidentally printed a block of stamps upside  
down and the resulting stamps were rare  
and extremely valuable. Dad took special  
tweezers called tongs and raised this rare  
stamp high over our heads. He paused,  
smiled, and let it go.

Even then I was tempted to push my  
hands out, to save the fluttering piece of  
paper which dad said was worth thousands  
of dollars. But I restrained myself, and  
watched with him as he let it fall.

Dad smiled as the stamp landed like  
a dead butterfly on the floor. Then, with the  
stamp now dead and inert, he delicately  
plucked it up by its edge.

I never forgot this lesson. The sum-  
mer of my sixteenth year we were to write  
a book together about postal covers. I  
imagined it would look like his other book,  
brown leather with gold embossed letter-  
ing. My name in lights.

But then dad took me on a vacation.  
He took me to the Virgin Islands. He began  
to act strangely, lingering at my bedside at  
prayer time, extending his back rubs to the  
sides of my chest. I, the budding writer,  
had no words for this strange behavior. He  
still talked law to me at breakfast, politics  
for lunch and philately for dinner.

But after that vacation, the idea for  
the stamp book was never discussed again.  
He came out of the bathroom one after-  
noon and literally jumped on me in my  
own bed. My trusted father literally raped  
me. When I cried out "Ughhhhh!" in pain,  
he said, "Shhhhh or the neighbors will hear."

Words have failed me for many years  
since then. It's been difficult to focus. My  
view has been cluttered with hundreds of  
fragments of feelings, snips of memory,  
scraps of tape with phrases of his voice, all  
like torn pieces of paper, fluttering in the  
air. At first, a part of me wanted to grab at  
the pieces as they fell. To stop the flood of  
tears, to press down the confusion, to grab  
at fragments of piano music which I  
couldn't remember anymore. I tried to  
clutch, but even as I did, I noticed that  
nothing would make my digestion right  
and that it was best to let the tears just flow.

When I tried to obviously save my-  
self, run away, ask for help, he would grab  
my soul, paper-thin with fear, and crumple  
it some; I would become more invisible,  
Eventually I got away. Folded myself like  
a paper plane and let myself fly with less  
concern for where I landed and more in-  
terest in finding another place to be. I  
learned to wait, not push out my hand to  
grab, but to wait, and watch as the pieces of  
my soul reappeared. Then I picked up  
those pieces, carefully, by the edges and put  
them, safely, where they belong.

# A "Risen" in the Butt

by Jade Murray (a pen name for a local writer)

When I was four years old, I lived in Atlanta, Georgia with my mother. I clearly remember the time when my right buttock was infested with a boil or 'risen' as it is commonly referred to by Southerners. A risen is like a gigantic pimple. I'm not sure how one gets it; I'm told it's a virus.

The year is 1967; I have been sick with this risen for about two weeks; it hurts so much that I can't sit down. My caring mother puffs up the pillow for me to sit on. I go into the bathroom to try to pee. I hear voices in the apartment but I don't care who it is, I'm in pain. I go back to my pillows in front of the television to continue watching "Sesame Street." From the bedroom, my mother asks me if I want a popsicle.

"Yes, I want one," I say with full expectations of her bringing one to me.

"Well, come into the bedroom and get it," she answers.

I think, "Dang it, she knows that I have a risen on my bootie and it hurts me to walk. Shoot, I ain't getting up!"

"Jade, did you hear me? Come in here and get this thang!" she demands.

Making the move to the bedroom, I'm griping to myself, "Dang it! Dang it! Why are grown-ups so stupid? They should know better than to have popsicles in the

bedroom, because they belong in the kitchen in the ice box!"

When I enter the room my mother looks at me nervously; her eyes are neither harsh nor gentle; she has a purposeful look as if she is about to do something regretful. Just from the look of her eyes, I know that I don't want to be near her, so I try to turn and run, I mean walk, out of the bedroom. I don't make it far as three women jump out of the closet near the bedroom door and grab my tiny arms and legs.

"Oh, no, please don't touch me! I'm in pain! My bootie hurts, pleeceeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!"

They hold me down on my stomach like they're nailing me to a cross only my legs are apart. My mother positions herself to "pop" my risen. I feel her hands pushing my risen — the pain, oh God, the pain! I think that they're going to kill me.

I turn my head as I see my mother push again and again. Pus, more pus, and even more pus mixed with yukkey, yukkey stuff that has no name. I pass out about four times. Finally after what seems like hours, my mother says, "Good, I think I got the last of it, blood is now coming up!"

I am silent. My voice has left me. "I'll never trust you again" is my only thought. After about five more pushes the women

finally release their grip from my limp arms and legs.

The events following my risen-popping experience are unclear; yet I knew that my mother and I had a new negative element in our relationship, distrust. For some time afterwards, I feared her every move. The scene from Elie Weisel's *Night*, in which he describes a brutal beating that he was forced to endure by Nazi soldiers as his father watched helplessly surfaces into my mind. When the ruthless soldiers grew tired of beating him they asked him if he had learned his lesson. Covered with blood and nearly dead, he shook his head about a hundred times nodding in agreement.

On the day after my 27th birthday, I phoned my mother with this new 'memory'. Surprisingly she admitted to remembering this incident, her simple response being:

"Jade, I had to do it... popping a risen is the only way to get rid of it. You would have gotten a fever... it hurt me to do it but... I had to do it!"

Not wanting to argue yet simply relay, I told her that I knew that she only meant good. Using this calm honest dialogue, I initiated, "So you admit this incident happened, right?"

"Yeah," she reluctantly answered.

Thinking that I'd be extra bold, I furthered, "It's funny, Alice, how you would believe me when I told you about this memory, but you denied everything else that I told I remembered. Particularly the fact about me being sexually molested."

Silence from her end.

I felt the inspiration to go on carefully and precisely by telling her that up until

recently, I have been walking around like an 'unpopped risen.' All along, this built-up risen in my heart kept getting touched, causing so much excruciating pain to me. Now the heart risen is being popped as all the ugliness from the past is surfacing. I convinced her that the only way that I was to be cured was to let all this shit come out (incest, child abuse, physical abuse, neglect, anger, pain, etc. etc.) despite how much it hurts us both. Knowingly all this nastiness was needed to surface therefore to allow the natural medicines to come in and cure.

Dead silence on the phone.

After about three minutes, I asked, "Why are you so silent?"

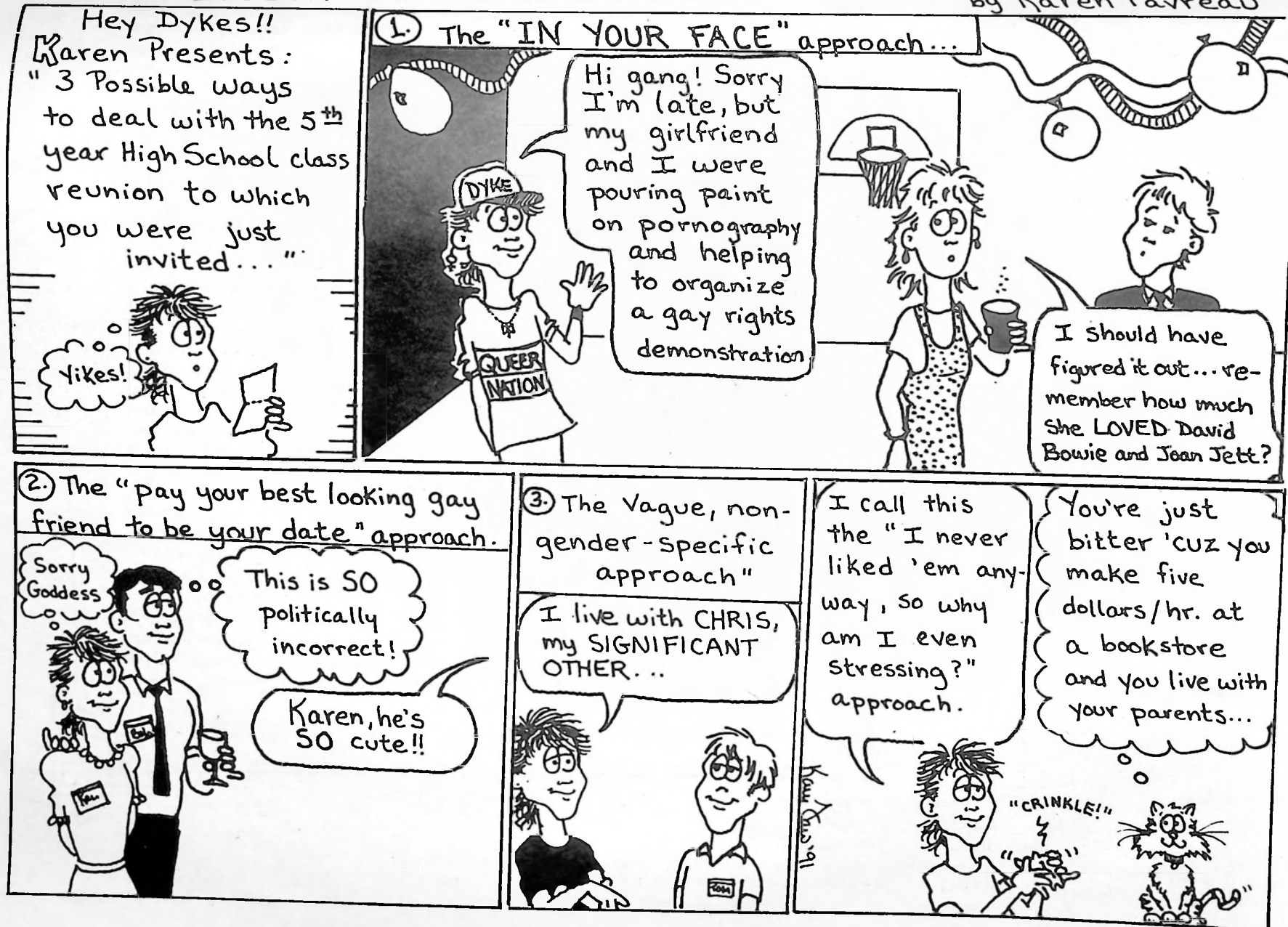
"I dunno... because I... don't know what to say... I... uh... think I... uh... understand."

Cautiously, not wanting to be appeased or fooled by her again, I said, "Alice, I hope you are telling me the truth. If you are that would be the best birthday gift of all to me."

Have I popped the risen between my mother and me? I wonder. Only time will tell if she was sincere. Part of me desperately wants to believe her, she was not argumentative this time. Perhaps it's different this time. Yet, I know my mother all too well — she is infamous for saying things that she won't carry through. I truly think she initially has the best intentions but never any action to carry it out. At this time, she is scared and thinks that I'm out of control and just like when I was younger, she will say what I desperately want to hear hoping I will, in turn, leave her completely alone.

## So It Goes...

by Karen Favreau





# Science Lesson "A Lie is a seed that sticks in your gut..."

by Dianne Monroe

Readers of the VWV may have noticed that an accidentally abbreviated version of this story appeared in the summer issue. The story appears in its entirety below. We extend our sincere apologies to the author.

Cora's neighbor, Vivian, did not believe in electricity. Nor did she believe man had gone to the moon. According to her, all that mess was just another way for the white man to mess with your mind and take your money.

A lot of people might have considered her just ignorant. In fact, at first I considered her rather quaint. Or somewhat exotic. Kind of like an unusual flower. Or an endangered species. That was until I learned why Cora didn't allow her children to eat any of the seeds in their fruit.

It was the fall of 1969, a heady time of reckless, naive optimism. Jim Crow was gone. But then so was Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Medgar Evers, Viloa De Luizzo and Goodman, Schwerner and Chaney. At the time a lot of us thought that "if you don't push it, it won't fall," and all we had to do was continue pushing.

I had signed up with a program to tutor "underprivileged" children in Birmingham, Alabama. Every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon I came to the tiny, boxed-in apartment of Cora Lee Williams in Southtown Projects to labor over grade school homework with her two daughters and any other neighborhood children who happened to stop by.

When we finished, after books and papers had been picked up, the living room straightened, and the tangle of neighborhood kids shooed back outside into the muddy courtyard to play, Cora rewarded her girls for their diligence with an orange.

With an extravagance that bordered on ceremony, Dora, the oldest, placed a knife and saucer on the kitchen table. Nicey, the youngest, got two oranges out of the refrigerator. Cora sliced the oranges in half and watched, eagle-eyed, while the girls

carefully scraped the seeds from the orange into the saucer. When she was satisfied that every seed lay in the saucer, she nodded. The two girls dashed out the door to play, the orange halves glittering like captured sunshine in their hands.

Cora would then pull out from her refrigerator two bottled Cokes. One she handed to me. Into hers she always poured the contents of one small package of Tom's salted peanuts.

Occasionally she served Luizanne coffee. With the same touch of ceremony, she poured hot water over the instant crystals. We each added Pet evaporated milk and heaping spoonfuls of sugar.

Then we would talk. About the latest anti-war demonstration I had attended. Or about the union organizing committee she had joined, down at the hospital where she worked. But what I liked best was when she told me her stories. About growing up one of nine children of a sharecropper in Picken's County. Or how she had taken part in the infamous demonstrations that had broken Jim Crow's back in what was known as the most segregated city in the south.

I was curious about the unique ritual of the scraping of the orange seeds onto the saucer but never got up the courage to inquire as to its origins.

Then one day when Cora had to work late, I brought some grapes to share with the girls.

"Do they have seeds?" asked Dora, always the timid one.

"Mama don't let us eat no seeds," Nicey offered in explanation.

"Ain't you 'fraid to eat seeds?" Dora asked.

"She ain't 'fraid of nothing," Nicey proclaimed admiringly.

"Why should I be afraid of eating some seeds?" I asked, "They can't hurt me."

"Uh-huh," said Dora, "Uncle Fred, that's Mama's little brother that we never knowed, he died from swallowing a wa-

termelon seed that stuck in his stomach and growed there till it killed him."

"What?!" I said, "could you run that past me again?"

Nicey darted into the bedroom and came back carrying an oversize family album. It's sedges were frayed from the touch of many hands.

"Nicey, you know Mama don't 'low us to play with her good pictures when she ain't here," Dora hissed.

Nicey cut her eyes at her sister and opened the book very carefully to one sepia-toned picture. She pointed her stubby finger at the yellowed snapshot, as if it offered proof.

"Here. This is our Uncle Fred that we never knowed. He died when he wasn't no bigger than Dora is now. Mama tell us the story lotsa times. Say he was her favorite."

In bits and pieces the story tumbled out from the children's mouths, jumbled but crystal clear.

When Fred was about eight, he came down with stomach cramps. In spite of all home remedies known, the pain worsened and he burned with fever. Sharecroppers almost never took their children to doctors, but Cora's mother and father decided that everything possible must be done for their son. So they gathered up all the money they had in the world. The boy was placed on a pallet in the back of the wagon for the long trip to town. Cora, then twelve, was chosen to ride along. Her family's life savings was knotted into a kerchief and tucked between her just-beginning breasts. Her brother's fevered head rested in her lap.

There was only one doctor in town. His office had two waiting rooms. No one in the "colored" waiting room was seen until the "white only" waiting room was empty. By that time the boy was dead, although they had thought he was finally sleeping, his head still resting on Cora Lee's lap.

The doctor told Cora's father that the boy had died of a watermelon seed he had swallowed, that had started to grow in his

stomach. For this information, he took the money Cora carried between her new breasts.

After that, on the rare occasions that Cora's parents were able to give their children fruit, a saucer was placed on the table. Under the watchful eyes of a parent, each child carefully placed the seeds into that saucer. This tradition multiplied as Cora, and her brothers and sisters, grew to adulthood and had children of their own.

The children's recounting of this family legend definitely changed the afternoon's lesson plan.

"O.K. kids," I said, "Today we're going to have a science class. I got a big word for y'all, 'photosynthesis', now who can say that?"

I went about explaining, the best I knew how, so a child could understand, the complete impossibility of the lie told by that country doctor in exchange for their grandparents' life savings.

"So what you think?" I asked.

Dora and Nicey found reason to study the tops of their shoes for some time. Nicey twisted a button on her blouse.

"That's about what you'd expect from an ugly old white man," she blurted out.

"Know what I think," Dora mumbled, twirling one braid around her finger, "I think a lie is a seed that sticks in your gut and grows there till it explodes and kills you."

"Naw-uh," Nicey shot back, eyes blazing, "Not if you vomit it up first. Can't kill you then."



## Fela's Agenda, cont. from page 1

There is nothing "cultural" about the commercialized rape and exploitation of female performers sharing a stage with predominantly male musicians. Culture and customs should not be used as a ploy to conceal the true intentions of those responsible for the exploiting. Perhaps this is why I was hesitant in my decision to confront this issue because I thought I was being too critical in my observations and disregarding the cultural aspects of West African dance forms. But it was clear towards the end of the performance set that the dancers did engage in a group dance piece which was more of a cultural statement - void of the previous opened legs, ass and tits which were on display to the audience and to Fela himself. It would have been more culturally enriching to have had more of the traditional West African dance art forms in the performance but because Fela was focused more on the issue of sex in his numbers, tradition would have been defeated by the selfish gratification and gyrations of the lead singer himself. I do not consider myself an expert on West African dance even though I have studied varied dance forms and have witnessed numerous West African traditional dance pieces. But one does not have to be an expert to decipher sexual exploitation when it boldly glares one in the face. This I feel is definitely something which tran-

sends the cultural boundaries of women as well as being an issue across the globe.

As an African-American woman, I felt disturbed by the end of the festival. In fact, I was not sure how I was supposed to feel considering the fact that I was requested at the last minute to fill in as one of the emcees that evening. Now I wish that I had declined as emcee which would have given me the freedom as well as the choice to dismiss myself. In essence, I had to bite my tongue and grit my teeth to keep my mouth shut. I was not responsible for the program booking logistics and therefore I felt I had better suppress my criticisms until later. Although I enjoyed the percussion and instrumental qualities of Egypt 80 (his back-up musicians), I did not appreciate Fela's frame of mind as a performing artist nor his domination and dictatorship over his female performers. It was appalling to hear at times political lyrics being sung while witnessing these women being sexually exploited for Fela's ulterior motives (which could not possibly have been in the name of empowerment of the oppressed). While many of the men literally lost their pants to the dancers on stage, many of the women shook their heads in dismay or split the scene out of humiliation. Some women were too stunned to move. When I realized that this was all we were going to get from Fela that evening I was

disappointed. I was wishing that Fela could have somehow had more time to deal with political issues but I realized that enough damage had been done and it was time for him to go. I don't think anyone would have taken him seriously after watching the smut that had gone before. I feel he lost the respect of a lot of individuals - at least from me anyway.

As artists, writers and social activists, we have the responsibility to profoundly change these dangerous times in which we exist today. I am at a point in my life now where if something is not going to empower or encourage me I want no part of it. I am in the space to empower others as well as to be empowered as a human being. I do not need to deal with anything that is irrelevant to my growth and personal transitions, particularly if the message is negative, disempowering or futile. While it is a fact that the images of women in music videos and concerts share a similar profile on our own homefront, this does not leave us exempt from dealing with this issue. I personally demanded more from Fela because of his previous musical ethics as well as the social and political struggles of his people.

I have made the personal commitment never to attend another Fela concert. If this is what his music has amounted to then I would rather hear about the social

and political struggles affecting Nigeria (as well as other African nations) from the mouths and writings of the women themselves. Then I can be sure of getting to the meat of the issues as seen and lived by those women who have the courage to let their words - like urgent rivers - hit the page.

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A LESBIAN PARADISE!

# Broadly Speaking: Pardon Me, Sir, But Would You Get Out Of My Face?

by Betty Mansfield

*Broadly Speaking*, Mansfield's monthly column, appears in several gay/lesbian newspapers nationwide.

One day last week, I was out taking a walk and enjoying the weather. I was wearing sweat pants and a tank top (Yes, with a bra, mom). As I passed an old store where some construction was going on, some guy, a total stranger, comes out and yells, "Heeey, nice set o' tits!"

Now, my question is: What possesses someone to approach another person, whom he's never met, with some comment on her anatomy? I mean, what kind of response does he want? I ignore him and keep walking.

Then, I'm at the hardware store, looking at vegetable seeds for my garden. Some old guy comes up to me and says, "Aw, go on, buy the watermelon." What does this mean? The guy's smiling as if he just told me a joke. He seems like a nice enough person, though, so I smile and even try to laugh a little. and then he looks very pleased with himself and goes on his way.

Now I'm not antisocial, but I'm not really outgoing either, I don't have one of the friendliest faces around and I don't usually smile at strangers. So, why would anyone even want to speak to me? It's like I'm wearing a name tag that says HI! MY NAME IS BETTY. SAY SOMETHING TO ME, ANYTHING.

Yesterday, I'd had a fairly bad day. I was at the mall and decided to sit and rest a while. I bought myself a cup of coffee and a pastry and sat down to relax for a few minutes, when—you guessed it—some guy I've never seen in my life walks up to me and says, "Hey! You shouldn't be eating that stuff. Oh, you'll be getting fat!"

I send him one of my fuck you looks. (A friend of mine recently commented that I have only two facial expressions: Fuck me and Fuck you. I guess I should be careful to always wear the fuck you look when I go out in public.)

Anyhow, when I look at this guy, he sort of clues in to the fact that I'm a bitch, so he tries to patch things up by adding, "You're too pretty to go getting fat!" I give

him another fuck you look and finally he goes away.

Then, just this morning, I'm out walking. (Yes, again—how brazen!) There's this old white man swaggering like John Wayne down the pavement in front of me. There's a woman pushing a baby stroller toward us. As she walks by the old man, he kind of sidles up to her as if he's going to say something, but he just looks at her. Then he turns and sidles up to me and I think he's going to ask for spare change. He says, "Excuse me.. Did you see that woman? She was a white woman and she had a black baby in that stroller." I give him the fuck you look. He holds up his hands, exasperated, and says, "Well, am I right?"

Finally, I speak up: "So what. What business is it of yours? Or mine? I don't know you and I don't care to hear your opinion."

He looked crushed! To think that a complete stranger would speak to him so rudely! "Sheeez, what the hell...," he grumbles as he's walking away.

Bear in mind, all this happened in just the last week. Over the span of a woman's life, she gets to hear such gems of cordiality and wit as:

- What are you doing here?
- Who are you with?
- How come you ain't with anybody?
- Hey, where are you goin', babe?

- Hey, smile!
- Hey, nice set of sticks.
- Hey, wanna ride?
- Hey, look at this!

And so on. Now, would somebody please explain to me why straight men seem to think women might want to hear these comments? It's as if they think: "I see you; therefore you exist."

I asked a friend about this. Her theory is that straight men feel compelled to always emit something—words, hawks, burps, farts, semen, noises,—anything. "It's like they need to scent the area."

I suppose this idea of marking territory is true; they do seem more prone to make comments whenever you approach what they perceive as their space: a neighborhood bar, a construction zone, a hardware store, a gas station.

I once worked for a straight man who thought it was okay for him to sit at my desk or fart in my office or say anything that popped into his head because he owned the building; it was his turf. (I was eventually "let go" because I gave him the fuck you look when he wanted the fuck me look.)

Anyway, I don't hate all straight men. I can think of several that I like. But I swear the next time some total stranger gets in my face with his straight, white, male opinion, I'm going to look him in the eye and belch.



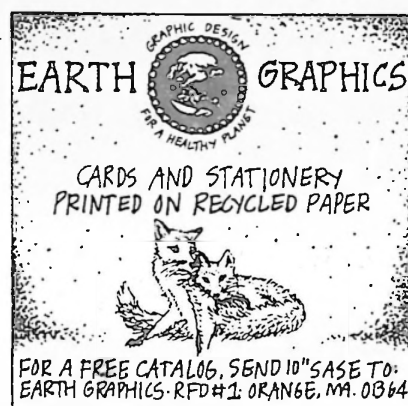
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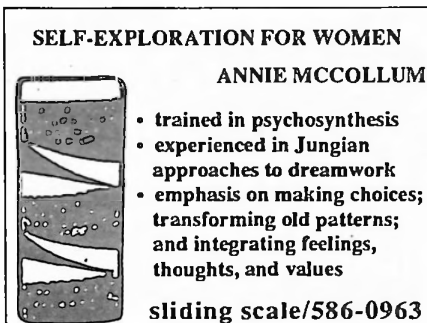
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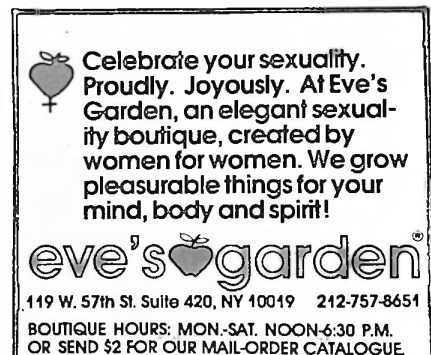
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## DYKES TO WATCH OUT FOR

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**the MARKET PLACE**

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HEY, GINGER! YOU'RE LOOKING GOOD. I HEAR YOU HAVE A NEW LOVE INTEREST!

YEAH. HOW 'BOUT THAT?

GODDESS... A LONG-DISTANCE RELATIONSHIP. HOW ROMANTIC!

I KNOW. ALL I HAVE TO DO IS SEE HER HANDWRITING IN THE MAILBOX AND I FEEL LIKE I'M GONNA BURST, IT'S SO INTENSE.

JEEZ! AND YOU HAVEN'T EVEN KISSED YET?

NOPE. AND WE WON'T TILL ONE OF US FINDS THE TIME AND MONEY FOR A VISIT. LISTEN, I CAME IN TO GET A PRESENT TO SEND HER. YOU KNOW, SOME FUNKY LITTLE THING.

WELL YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE! 'FUNKY LITTLE THING' IS OUR MIDDLE NAME!

VENUS OF WILLENDORF COFFEE. MUG? NOVELTY T-SHIRT? ECOLOGICALLY CORRECT CANVAS SHOPPING BAG WITH OUR LOGO ON IT?

EROTIC VIDEO? STAINED GLASS VULVA FOR YOUR KITCHEN WINDOW? VENUS OF WILLENDORF BOXER SHORTS?

WHERE DID YOU GET ALL THIS STUFF?

WE'VE BEEN EXPANDING! IN FACT, THE STORE IS DOING SO WELL, JEZANNA'S HIRING FOR A NEW POSITION!

OH, LOIS MENTIONED THAT SHE'S GONNA APPLY FOR IT.

YEAH, SO AM I. IT WOULD BE KIND OF A PROMOTION. I'D GET TO ORDER STUFF LIKE THIS, AND ALL THE ALBUMS AND TAPES AND C.D.'S.

IS THAT A PROBLEM BETWEEN YOU AND LOIS?

IT MUST BE A LITTLE UNCOMFORTABLE, COMPETING FOR THE SAME JOB.

OH, NO! WE'RE ABOVE ALL THAT. JEZANNA WILL HIRE THE MOST QUALIFIED WOMAN FOR THE JOB. I'LL FEEL FINE ABOUT WHATEVER SHE PICKS.

AS LONG AS IT'S ME.



# SEPTEMBER ANNOUNCEMENTS

**Names Project Quilt:** Volunteers are needed for long and short term commitments for a range of activities, including: hosting quilting bees to create new panels, memorializing local people who have died from AIDS, to be added to the NAMES Project Quilt, hosting coordinating committees and working on the days of the event. For people who know a panel already exists for a friend or relative who has died from AIDS, that panel may be specifically requested to appear in the Springfield showing of the Quilt (October 26 and 27). For more information, to request specific panels and to sign up as a volunteer, please contact Sonja Larson at Family Planning Council of Western Massachusetts, 586-2016.

**The Eisteddfod Traditional Arts Festival** will celebrate its 20th anniversary Sept. 20, 21 and 22 on the campus of Southeast Massachusetts University. Evening and afternoon concerts, contra dancing, and free workshops will present traditional music from Ireland and Great Britain, and such indigenous American music forms as the blues, old timey, maritime, ballads, southern and New England fiddling, and more. For ticket prices and additional information call (508) 999-8546 anytime for reservations, Mon-Fri, 8 am-3 pm for information.

**At the Everywoman's Center:** The Against Violence Against Women Programs at the EWC invite you to join them in their efforts to empower women around issues of violence. Counselor/Advocates staff a 24 hour Hotline and offer counseling and advocacy to victim/survivors of sexual assault and battering. Educator/Advocates offer educational workshops and respond to community events. These programs depend on committed volunteers to help in the fight to end secrecy and silence about violence against women. If you are interested in participating in our next training, please call at 545 3474 by September 16. Bicultural and Bilingual women are encouraged to apply.

**Acts Institute, Inc.** announces the publication of an invaluable resource for writers, artists, scholars and scientists seeking a break away from home and business to work on their projects. "Havens for Creatives," a directory of more than 100 residential retreats worldwide, is available for only \$5 from ACTS, P.O. Box 10153, Kansas City, MO 64111.

The "Living With..." Group, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to broaden-

ing public understanding of the scope of the AIDS epidemic, today unveiled its awareness campaign, "Someone I Love Has AIDS." The initial phase of the campaign will feature a 2" square button. (see center of page) which will be available to AIDS service and educational organizations on an "at-cost" basis. "Living With..." is seeking people nationwide who have positions of visibility to wear the button thereby increasing the campaign's effectiveness. Inquiries should be directed to: Tom Halley, The "Living With..." Group, 304 Newbury St., Suite #251, Boston, MA 02115-2832; ph. (617) 353-0560.

**Group for Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse** - The Women's Pavilion at Mercy Hospital is forming an ongoing support group beginning in September. FMI call Pavilion at (413) 785-4637 or Pam Tyson (facilitator) at (413) 586-1835.

**Women in the Trades and Non-traditional Jobs** support group is meeting the second Monday of every month, 5:45 pm, at Roberto's Restaurant on 223 Pleasant St. in Northampton. FMI call Sadie at (413) 527-8357 or Kat at (413) 781-6900.

**P-Flag Pioneer Valley** ((Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) meets at 7:30 pm on the second Tuesday of each month in Grace Episcopal Church Parish Hall (occasionally Choir Room), Spring St., Amherst, MA. FMI call (413) 532-4882.

**Call for Lesbian Records** - Lesbians worldwide are invited to enter their favorite record(s) in the First Annual Book of Lesbian World Records. We want your stories, graphics, cartoons and photos expressing serious, political and humorous accomplishments. No one denied entry for excessive creativity. This is your recorded lesbian herstory. Send S.A.S.E. to: Seahorse Productions, 1918 Lakeshore Ave, ste 32, Oakland CA 94606.

**Women Prisoners of Conscience** need your support. Oppressed women political prisoners can often be helped by your letters. Join the Women's Urgent Action Network of Amnesty International, sending letters on behalf of women prisoners of conscience. For more information write to Amnesty International USA Women's

Program, 322 Eighth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10001.

**Women's Talent Showcase** - Indigo, located at 823 Main St., Cambridge, is seeking women who would like to participate in *Express Yourself*, a talent showcase for women. No try-outs are required but a video or cassette tape would be helpful. Women of color strongly encouraged to apply. Call 617 884 5540 for more info. Women singers, dancers, comics etc. who would like to perform upstairs at Indigo should not hesitate to call.

**6th Annual Women in the Visual Arts Exhibition** - This national exhibition, open to all women artists 18 years and older, is an integral part of the region's International Women's Day Celebration and an essential feature of New Haven's month-long program in March '92 recognizing women in the arts. Slide submission deadline is December 15, 1991 (\$15 for three slides). The exhibition runs from March 4-29, 1992. For a prospectus send a SASE to: Women in the Visual Arts, 315 Peck Street, New Haven, CT 06513 or call (203) 865-5055.

**Resource/Referral Program** at the Everywoman's Center is seeking interns and volunteers to staff the EWC Resource Room. The Resource/Referral Program is a feminist-based information and referral source for many women within the University and the community. Volunteers and interns provide, update and develop information on many topics of concern to women. Orientation, on-going training and support is provided. Orientation begins September 17th and applications will be accepted until September 12th. For more info or an application, contact Program Director Sandy Mandel at Wilder Hall, UMASS or call 413 545 0883

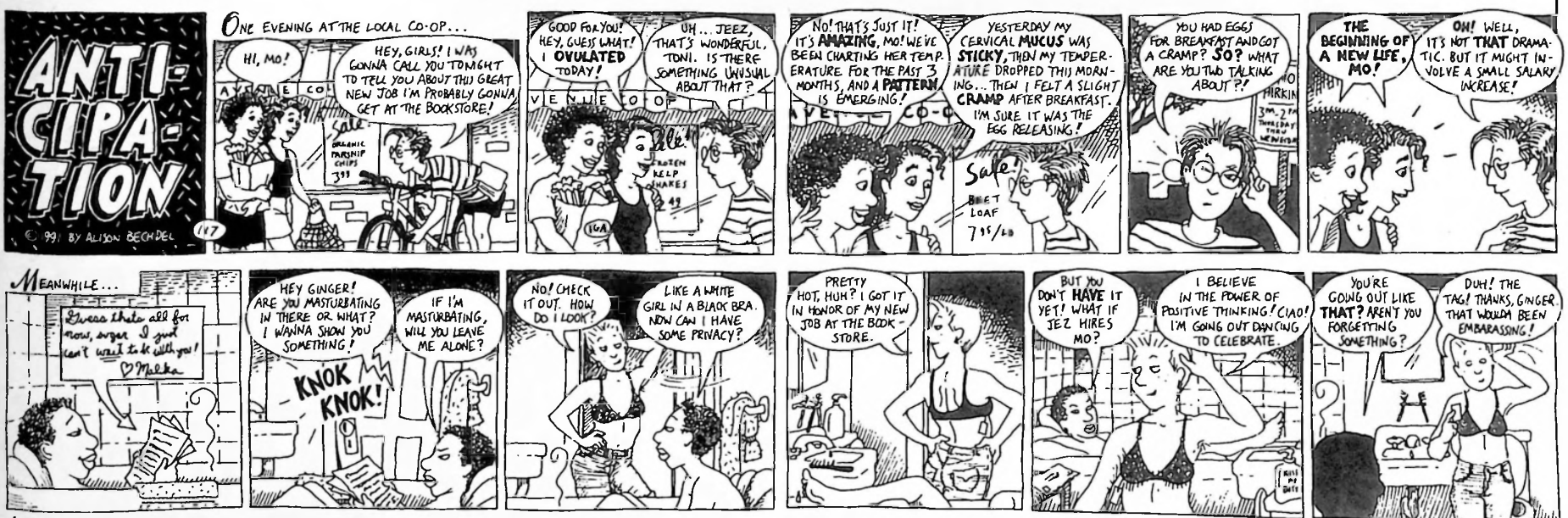
**Lifeline Counseling Center; Group Offerings** - *Coming Out Group for Lesbians* meets Wednesday evenings in Amherst, *Lesbian Therapy Group*, a general, ongoing group, meets Tuesday evenings in Amherst, *Alcohol and Drug Early Recovery Group* for lesbians, gay men and bisexuals meets each Monday night in Ludlow, co-sponsored by Spofford Hall. For more information, please call 253 2822

**Hampshire County AIDS Task Force** is now seeking nominees for its expanded steering committee. The Task Force unites over 100 concerned organizations and individuals to work on AIDS/HIV-related community education and action projects. The perspectives of those from the gay/Lesbian, Latino/a, African-American, intravenous drug use and AIDS caregiver communities are particularly welcome as the Steering Committee is expanded. For more info, or to obtain a nomination form, call Ellen Koteen 733 6624 M-Th, or the Task Force answering machine 586 6950 ext. 251 Deadline for returning forms: Oct 1.

**Women's Veteran Support Network** - The Pallas Athena network has been formed by women veterans to provide an open, supportive network through which women veterans can discuss issues, experiences, and ideas with other women who have been in military service. Their bi-monthly publication, "Pallas Athena", provides articles of interest to women veterans as well as resource info, letters, fiction and creative works by women veterans. ALL women veterans encouraged to participate—regardless of race, creed, religion or sexual orientation. A discreet supplement by/for lesbian veterans is available. Not affiliated with any agency of the government or any political party. Mailing list held in strictest confidence.

**Workshop on Adoption and Search** - Co-sponsored by the department of Social Services and TRY, a non-profit Resource/Referral Center for adoption issues. Features a panel of adoptees, adoptive parents, and birth parents discussing the decision to search for birth families, the variety of search techniques, and the impact of discovery. Workshop held at Brightside, 2112 Riverside Rd. W. Springfield, MA on Sept 17, 1991 from 9:30 til noon. All persons interested personally or professionally are invited to attend. Conference is free. You may register at door, or for reservations, contact: attn. Karen Sandini, Registrar Dept of Social Services, 24 Farnsworth St, Boston MA 02210 617 727 0900 ext 391.

## DYKES TO WATCH OUT FOR



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# September Calendar

## September 5, 7, 8

**Auditions:** Neil Simon has re-written his classic comedy *The Odd Couple* to focus on two divorced women. Roles for six women who must be currently enrolled at one of the 5-Colleges. Auditions on the 5th and 7th are at the MHC Lab Theatre at 7 pm and on the 6th at SC Theatre Bldg T109 also at 7 pm.

## September 5, 19

**Meeting:** The Valley Gay Alliance meets the first and third Thursday of every month, 7:30 PM at the Unitarian Society, 220 Main St, Northampton. Meetings and membership open to all Lesbians, gay men, family and friends.

## September 5, 12, 19, and 26

**Meeting:** Queer Nation meets Wednesdays from 6:00-7:00 pm at Bangs Community Center in Amherst. Bangs is handicapped accessible. All queers welcome. FMI call (413) 584-42113.

**Meeting:** Act-up meets Wednesdays from 7:30-8:30 pm at Bangs Community Center in Amherst.

## September 6

**Film:** *Thelma and Louise*, that amazing movie, will be playing at UMASS in the Campus Center Auditorium at 7:30 and 10:00 PM. Admission \$1

## September 8

**Reception:** There will be a public reception at the Northampton Center for the Arts from 3:00 to 5:00 PM for the opening of the exhibition *The Figure: Personal Views and*

*Collaborations*, a group show of five area women artists—Jaq Chartier, Corinne Chandless, Susan Finnigan, Denise Provost and Susan Rodegast-Gelotte. The show runs from September 4 to October 6 in the East and West Galleries at the Center.

## September 9, October 7

**Meeting:** Kaleidoscope, a group for older lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and friends in the Pioneer Valley will meet at 6:30 pm at the Bangs Community Center on Boltwood Walk in Amherst, MA. FMI, call Corrie at (413) 525-2188, Warren 586-4277, or Dave at 773-3092. Or write: KALEIDOSCOPE, p.o. Box 1123, Greenfield, MA 01302.

## September 11

**Valley Women's Voice Open House -** We are opening our doors to all interested women to come by check out the office and meet current collective members. Come with questions and an empty stomach (food and refreshments will be provided in ample quantities). We are located in room 321 of the Student Union. Festivities from 3:30-5:30 p.m. FMI call 545-2436. **Note:** This is an informal 'get to know the Voice,' gathering; a more formal informational session will occur on September 18.

## September 18

**Valley Women's Voice Membership Meeting -** This will be a formal meeting open to all women interested in becoming a part of the Voice's Herstory. The VWV provides excellent opportunities to become an active member of the women's community as well as gain valuable skills in the capacity of writer, editorial staff, accountant, ad-representative, production staff, distribution coordinator etc. The meeting

will be from 6:30-7:30 p.m. FMI and meeting location call 545-2436.

## September 23

**Meeting:** The recently formed LGBouting club Venture Out, whose focus is non-competitive outdoor sports, will hold an informational meeting from 7-9 pm first floor of Sullivan Square in Northampton. FMI please contact Ms. Tommy Shuman (413) 586-3578 or Mr. Mark Carmien (413) 584-3145. All LGB supporters welcome.

## September 26

**Lecture:** Elena Poniatowska, Five College Distinguished Visitor, on Latin American Women Writing Today. At Dwight Auditorium at Mount Holyoke College. 7 PM.

## September 26

**Film:** *Entre Nous*, a film about an intense friendship between two women in post-war France, will be shown at UMASS at 7:30 PM in Campus Center 803. Sponsored by the Program for GLB Concerns. Admission free.

## September 28

**Book Reading:** Historian Lillian Faderman, author of *Surpassing the Love of Men*, will read from her most recent book, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America*, at 7:30 pm at LUNARIA bookshop (women only). FMI call (413) 586-7851.

## October 3

**Lecture:** Author and poet Grace Paley will be speaking at the Student Union Ballroom at UMASS at 7:30 PM. Sponsored by Hillel at UMASS. Students-Free. General Public-\$3.



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## CLASSIFIED ADS

**Write From the Heart:** writing classes for women taught by Leslea Newman, author of 11 books, start the second week of September. Supportive, encouraging atmosphere, no previous writing experience necessary. 584-3865.

**PMS Group Support,** education, stress reduction. Tuesday evenings in Northampton. Ten week commitment. Fee. Call Mary Beth Averill, LICSW, 584-0631.

Please donate any spare copies of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s *Why we Can't Wait* to Haiti. Send to Amy Sandridge c/o Lynx Air, Suite A, 1995 W. Commercial Blvd, Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33309. Also, please write me. I want pen pals.

**Blazing Star Herbal School** Fall apprenticeship program begins October 7. Com-

prehensive herbal study includes medicinal herbs, preparation, therapeutics, gardening, natural cosmetics, flower essences and more. One day and weekend workshops. Send SASE for free brochure: GAIL ULRICH, P.O. Box 6, Shelburne Falls, Massachusetts, 01370. (413) 625-6875.

**Meditation Retreat** for lesbians led by Arinna Weisman. Date: October 12-14 at Noble View, Russell, Ma. Cost \$75 per person. For more information call: 586-3516.

**Protect yourself CURB** is tear gas in a canister for self-defense. Incapacitates attacker for 20 minutes. Purse size \$12.50, home/auto \$17.50. Payable to: United Assistance Co., 1181 Lakeview Drive, Forest City, FL 32708 (must be over 18, no police record).

## Survivors Bulletin Board

The *Valley Women's Voice* remains committed to supplying updated, uplifting and life affirming info to women survivors of incest and other abuse. Is there anyone out there willing to revive the "Survivor's Bulletin Board" or start a new column? We're always getting books on the subject for review, but we need the women to write! Must be someone/woman who can be self-directed. Call us at 545-2436 if interested in one time or ongoing.

321 Student Union

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